

Includes a 7% increase in Veterans Administration funding, including a large expansion of funding to treat new illnesses linked to Agent Orange exposure, to ensure former service members get the treatment they deserve

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July 28, 2010

Washington, D.C. – Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) supported and helped the House pass by a 411-6 margin the Fiscal Year 2010 appropriations bill for military construction and Veterans Affairs. The legislation provides for \$141.1 billion in funding, which is 5% more than current levels, to fund the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), military construction, and related activities. A key highlight of the bill is increased support for Veterans healthcare to cover expanded claims for Agent Orange exposure as the VA has announced an expanded list of health effects possibly linked to such exposure. The bill now awaits reconciliation with the Senate and the signature by the President before becoming law.

“With more than a million Veterans in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and our National Guard having seen its largest deployment since World War II, this bill is particularly important for Pennsylvania families,” said Congressman Sestak. “It is our moral obligation to ensure the men and women who wear the cloth of this nation receive the best possible treatment for themselves and their families. This legislation recognizes areas that require improvement and provides critical funds to meet these needs, including billions of dollars for military housing, allowing the VA to offer more medical services to more Veterans.

As the highest ranking Veteran ever to serve in Congress according to the House historian, Congressman Sestak has worked hard to address the needs of Veterans at the local and national level. The Congressman's District Office has been open 7 days a week and has hosted four Veterans Summits as well as a number of other gatherings that have brought together regional and national Veterans officials, including the Chief of Staff, Department of Veterans Affairs and senior policy makers, such as House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Bob Filner, to Pennsylvania, to directly engage our Veterans in substantive discussions on the issues facing them and their families. One such issue that has been raised is concern over exposure to Agent Orange

"I am determined to see that each Veteran is aware of the benefits to which they are entitled and has the opportunity to use them to full effect," said Congressman Sestak. "My office continues to work seven days a week with Veterans and their families from WWII through to Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. I will never forget the slights that our Vietnam Veterans endured. That must never happen again. Though improvements have been made since 2007, there is still much more to do."

KEY INVESTMENTS

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS: \$120.8 billion for Veterans medical care, claims processors, and facility improvements, which is \$11.2 billion above 2010 and \$1.5 million below the request. In addition, \$50.6 billion is provided as advance appropriations for fiscal year 2012 for three medical accounts: medical services, medical support and compliance, and medical facilities – a \$2.4 billion or 5.0 percent increase over 2011.

- **Veterans Health Administration (VHA):** \$48.8 billion for veterans medical care, which was advance funded in the 2010 bill, matching the request and \$3.7 billion above 2010. The Veterans Health Administration estimates it will treat more than 6.1 million patients in 2011, including more than 439,000 veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan.

- **Medical Services:** \$37.1 billion to improve access to medical services for all Veterans, which was advance funded in the 2010 bill, matching the request and \$2.4 billion above the 2010 level.
- **Mental Health:** \$5.2 billion, matching the request and \$410 million above 2010, for mental health services to help veterans suffering from conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and traumatic brain injury.
- **Assistance for Homeless Vets:** \$4.2 billion, matching the request and \$696 million above 2010, including \$218 million for the homeless grants and per diem program, \$51 million for supportive services for low income veterans and families, and \$151 million for the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program.
- **Rural Health:** \$250 million, as requested, for innovative practices to improve access to care for Veterans in rural areas. More than 3.2 million (41 percent) of enrolled Veterans live in rural or highly rural areas.

- **Medical Support and Compliance:** \$5.3 billion, matching the request and \$377 million above 2010, to ensure the efficient operation of the Department's health care system. This appropriation was advance funded in the 2010 bill.
- **Medical Facilities:** \$5.7 billion, which was advance funded in the 2010 bill, matching the request and \$881 million above 2010. The increase is for non-recurring maintenance at existing facilities to address identified shortfalls and to ensure the Department's facilities remain capable of delivering world class medicine.
- **Medical and Prosthetic Research:** \$590 million, as requested and \$9 million above 2010, for medical and prosthetic research, including important research to address the needs of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans.

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Major and Minor Construction: \$1.7 billion, \$55 million above the request and \$223 million below 2010. Major construction funding of \$1.2 billion will enable the Department to implement the recommendations made by the Capitol Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) Commission, which was established to review facilities and determine their construction needs.

The \$40 million increase over the request in minor construction will enable the Department to complete a total of 114 projects in 2011.

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Extended Care Facilities: \$85 million for grants to States for construction and renovation of extended care facilities, matching the request and \$15 million below 2010. States must provide 35 percent of the cost, while the Department pays the other 65 percent. Demand for nursing home beds is increasing as veterans live longer and with chronic illnesses.

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General Operating Expenses: \$2.6 billion, \$13 million above the request and \$515 million above 2010, to enable the Department to hire more than 4,000 additional permanent claims processors to continue to work down the backlog of benefits claims and to reduce the time to process new claims. The most recent VA quarterly status report estimates that almost 490,000 claims are pending. Funds are also included to restore the staffing reductions proposed in the budget for the Education claims processing program.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION: \$18.7 billion, \$4.5 billion below 2010, for the base programs. The decrease from 2010 is attributable to the expected decline in requirements for BRAC, which will be completed in September 2011, and the success of the family housing privatization program. In addition, \$1.3 billion in emergency appropriations is provided for Overseas Contingency Operations, for a total funding level in the bill of \$20.0 billion, the same as the President's Request and \$4.7 billion below 2010.

- **Trainee Troop Housing Initiative:** \$190 million to accelerate the Army's program to modernize troop housing facilities for trainees. The Army has a need for \$1.7 billion to bring all 115,413 trainee barracks spaces up to standard and the program currently is not scheduled to finish until 2017.
- **Guard and Reserve Initiative:** \$200 million in additional funding for Army National Guard,

Air National Guard, Army Reserve, Navy and Marine Corps Reserve, and Air Force Reserve construction to address critical unfunded requirements, in recognition of the tremendous contributions made by Guard and Reserve personnel to emergency assistance, homeland security, and national defense.

- **BRAC 1990 Environmental Cleanup:** \$460 million, \$100 million above the request and \$36 million below 2010, to address the large unfunded backlog of environmental cleanup for bases that were closed during the four previous BRAC rounds. The current estimate to complete cleanup of BRAC locations is \$3.7 billion.

- **2005 BRAC and Re-stationing:** \$2.4 billion, matching the request, to implement base closures and realignments, and support the re-stationing of troops and their families from overseas to the U.S., by the statutory deadline of September 15, 2011.

- **Military Housing:** \$1.8 billion, matching the request, to further eliminate inadequate military housing while maintaining and improving existing units. This funding will help the DOD address more than 7,000 inadequate family housing units in 2011.

- **Overseas Contingency Operations:** \$1.3 billion to support additional military construction requirements to support operations and troop increases in Afghanistan.

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RELATED AGENCIES

American Battle Monuments Commission: \$65.7 million, \$2.9 million above 2010 and \$1.47 million above the President's Request. This funding provides for the care and operation of our military monuments and cemeteries around the world. The amount provided includes \$3.5 million for the construction and installation of Vietnam War battle maps at the Honolulu Memorial, and \$467,000 for expansion of the Commission's interpretive programs through development of interactive programs on the Commission website. The amount recommended includes \$1 million for refurbishment of the

Bataan Death March Memorial in the Philippines.

United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims: \$90.1 million, \$63 million above 2010 and matching the request. The increase includes funding for construction of a Veterans Courthouse and Justice Center. The number of cases heard annually by the court has nearly doubled since 2000.

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Cemeterial Expenses: \$39.6 million, \$1.5 million above the request and \$250,000 below 2010, for Arlington cemetery. The additional funding will enable Arlington Cemetery to hire needed personnel to address deficiencies identified in recent Army Inspector General and internal reviews.

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Armed Forces Retirement Home: \$71.2 million, \$62.8 million below 2010 and the same as the President's Request for the Armed Forces Retirement Home. The reduction reflects a decrease in funding required for replacement of the Scott building on the Washington, DC campus.

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STRENGTHENING MANAGEMENT AND OVERSIGHT

The effective stewardship of taxpayer dollars is a top priority for the Appropriations Committee. The bill takes important steps to strengthen management and oversight at the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs, including:

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Inspecting Military Construction in Afghanistan: \$10 million of the \$1.3 billion provided for Overseas Contingency Operations is directed to the DoD Inspector General to audit military construction projects in Afghanistan to ensure they meet standards for the life, health, and safety of our troops while protecting the interests of American taxpayers.

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DoD Fuel Infrastructure: The bill includes language urging the Secretary of Defense and the Director of Defense Logistics Agency to devote sufficient resources to recapitalize at-risk DoD fuel infrastructure. There is an upward trend of fuel spills at DoD facilities related to infrastructure or equipment failure.

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VA Inspector General: \$115 million, \$6 million above the request and 2010, to provide additional oversight personnel including initiatives regarding financial audit and information technology program reviews, the quality of outsourced care, and timely investigations of alleged medical misconduct.

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Strengthening VA Contract Oversight: \$23.6 million to strengthen VA acquisitions management. VA contract funding has grown substantially since 2001, but the capacity of the acquisition workforce has not kept pace, leading to increased risk of higher costs and unsuccessful contract outcomes. This funding supports a 5% increase in acquisition personnel and invests in appropriate training and technology to make the workforce more effective in managing taxpayer dollars.

VA Reserve Fund Controls: The bill includes language requiring the VA to better explain the use of its national reserve fund – including the planned allocation from each appropriation account to the reserve fund and 15-day advanced notification to the Committee before an obligation from the reserve can be made.

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VA Bid Savings Control: The VA enjoys considerable flexibility in allocating funding for major construction projects, but has provided little information about ongoing projects to the Committee. To address that issue, the bill includes language requiring the VA to notify the Committee of all bid savings totaling \$5 million or more or 5% of a project, whichever is less. The bill also requires the VA to notify the Committee prior to any change in the scope of a major construction project.

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SIGNIFICANT CUTS

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Information Technology: \$3.2 billion, \$85 million below both the request and 2010. This reduction is due to cancellation of a project and large unobligated balances in the account. Spending has lagged while the VA conducts a comprehensive review of the cost-effectiveness of all major IT projects.

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DOD Bid Savings: \$272.5 million below the request for military construction projects due to bid

savings.

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Guam: \$272.9 million below the request for military construction projects to realign Marine Corps forces to Guam, due to DOD's inability to address numerous concerns about the sustainability of the buildup as currently planned.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including as Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University.□ According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.